

The Chasm: Discussion Questions

By Randy Alcorn

After reading each chapter in *The Chasm*, explore the corresponding set of questions below. In each chapter, be sure to look at Mike Biegel's art and ask yourself what important aspect of the story it captures.

Chapter 1

1. Nick Seagrave says the sight of the chasm was "devastating." What would you say is the central meaning of the chasm? What forms has the chasm taken in your life?
2. Is there something that draws you toward Heaven (and drew you even before you knew God), in the same way that the main character was drawn to Charis?
3. Why do you think Nick's first impression of Charis (seen from a distance) was so negative?
4. In what ways are his initial perceptions of the "dreadful tyrant" he sensed in Charis similar to the perceptions people have of God?
5. How trustworthy have your own first impressions of people and places been?
6. Charis is described as a place of light, music, pleasure, adventure, and celebration. In your experience, what place or places have served as a foretaste of Heaven or of life on the New Earth? (Charis is the Greek word for grace. The author named Heaven in honor of God's grace, which is what allows us entry to Heaven.)
7. In what ways is the character of Joshua admirable and appealing?
8. Nick liked the sense of control he was given by Joshua, his guide. Is your personality one that likes to feel in control? In what ways is that true for you?
9. What are the most significant things you learn about Nick when Joshua takes him to what appears to be Nick's office?
10. What things do you learn about Nick while he's in his condo?
11. What do you learn about Nick in the mall interiors and in the restaurant?
12. From what you've seen of Nick so far, in what ways are you and he alike? In what ways are you different?

Chapter 2

1. What, if anything, does Nick gain by giving in to his physical lust and passions? What does he lose?

2. What's the apparent state of his relationship with his wife and with his children?
3. Nick says he came to see that "there's no such thing as a private moment; the whole cosmos is our audience for everything we do in the dark." To what extent do you believe this statement is true?
4. Why do you think Nick is so certain that his children will go on "to choose their own wrong roads"?
5. Nick wonders: If there is a hell, was I there already? What's the best answer to that question?
6. Do you agree with Joshua's assessment of the "roads of religion and spirituality"—that "they all have something that will benefit you"? Why or why not?
7. Nick wonders if there is "such a thing as truth." What do you think?
8. What seems to be the significance of this battle that rages on the plain? What is Nick meant to learn from it?

Chapter 3

1. Who do you think these two opposing commanders in this battle are meant to represent? How literally do you think we should conceive of them?
2. Why do you think Nick is such an important target for the dark commander's hatred?
3. Nick contrasts his own life environment—one of "compromise, rule bending, trade-offs, concessions, bargaining, striking deals, finding middle ground"—with the sharp distinctions he perceives on the battlefield: "Good was good; evil was evil," and they shared no common ground. Which description matches best with your own view of life?
4. In our own lives and existence, is there an unseen supernatural war going on? If so, what do you know about it? What signs do you see of it? What questions do you have about it?

Chapter 4

1. What appear to be the major personality traits of the black-robed character Nick observes in this chapter?
2. Who is this black-robed figure meant to represent?
3. What is most remarkable about the character Joshua?
4. Has there been anyone like Joshua in your own experience? If so, who?

Chapter 5

1. Why had Nick been so reluctant earlier to listen to the raggedly dressed white-haired man? Have you ever found it hard to listen to people you find unappealing?
2. Nick notices the “trancelike movements” of people on the gray roads, and the old man portrays them as misguided and hopeless. How close does this describe people today?
3. What strikes you about the artwork in this chapter?
4. Nick asks the old man, “Why the great battle? And why is evil winning?” As those questions relate to our own world today, what do you think are the best answers? Or are they unanswerable for the time being?
5. What is “walking the red road” about? Does it equate to any particular purpose or pursuit in your own life? Is Nick’s choice to walk this road similar to any decision you’ve made? Why do you suppose the author chose for the road to be red rather than another color?

Chapter 6

1. In the description given here of the chasm (or depicted in the art work), as Nick encounters it up close, what elements stand out most to you?
2. Should we recognize anything like the chasm in our own lives? What is it meant to represent?
3. What is our own degree of responsibility for the chasm that separates us, or once separated us, from what is on the other side?
4. Why does Nick fall into such despair? In his mind and heart, what forces are at work? And how similar are they to forces at work in your own mind and heart?
5. Who or what do you believe the old man, Shadrach, represents?

Chapter 7

1. What stands out most to you in this chapter’s description of the Woodsman?
2. Who is the Woodsman meant to represent?
3. What is the giant tree meant to represent? And why do you think the Woodsman is cutting the tree?

Chapter 8

1. Why won't the Woodsman allow Nick to help him cut down the tree? Why does Nick resent him for not receiving his help?
2. What is significant about the extensive and difficult labor required for the Woodsman to bring down the tree?
3. What do you think the nails are meant to represent?
4. What are the most important things Nick learns in this chapter?

Chapter 9

1. Nick experiences great swings in his attitudes toward the Woodsman and toward his own actions. To what degree is this similar to anything in your own life or that you've seen in others?
2. What is Nick meant to realize about the two armies—those above a glass ceiling, the others below a glass floor?
3. Nick says, "I realized in a moment of clarity that the world I'd always lived in, which I thought was the only world, was in fact a narrow isthmus caught between two great continents whose armies met here in battle. These forces clashing on the battleground of my world were powerful beyond measure and fought so desperately that the stakes must be higher than I could comprehend." Do you think this is an accurate description of our world? Why or why not?
4. To what degree do you think human beings have been accomplices with forces of supernatural evil in opposing what is supernaturally good?

Chapter 10

1. What are the most significant things Nick is learning in this chapter about the Woodsman?
2. Why do you think the Woodsman accepts no help or relief from anyone, even when it is urged upon him?
3. What progression do you see in this chapter in Nick's thoughts and attitudes toward the Woodsman?
4. Nick asks, "How could I be part of something so monstrous?" What do you think is the best answer to that question?
5. What was the chief cause of the Woodsman's death?

Chapter 11

1. How much is Nick to blame for the Woodsman dying?
2. What do you think the huge stone represents? The bloody heel of the woodsman and the crushed head of the beast?
3. Because of what has happened to the Woodsman, Nick detects that his journey “had been charted by an unseen hand, which had led me...to this moment.” How well does that fit as a description of your own life’s journey?
4. What does Nick have in common with the people the Woodsman is escorting across the tree? And what do you have in common with them?
5. Nick debates within himself if he really wants the Woodsman to come back for him. What is he struggling with?

Chapter 12

1. The Woodsman tells Nick, “The deed is done” and “The price is paid.” What is the full meaning of this deed and this payment?
2. What does Nick’s crossing equate to in your own life? Is this something you have already done? Is it something you need to do? Is it something you’ve been fearful of or avoiding for some other reason?
3. Why does Nick need to trust the Woodsman? And why is Nick hesitant to do this?
4. Why was it still impossible for Nick to cross the chasm on his own, even after the fallen tree had bridged it?
5. What are the biggest surprises for Nick in this chapter?
6. What seem to be the biggest questions still remaining in Nick’s mind and heart?
7. What’s most important for Nick to remember as he continues his journey toward Charis?
8. How do you think Nick can best explain to others what has happened to him?

To help you understand what the true “Woodsman” has done for you and how you can respond, find a Bible, and use the table of contents to help you locate the following passages. These are just a few of the passages in the Bible that can help you explore the truth about Jesus Christ; if you have questions as you read them, be sure to talk to a believer in Jesus to help you discover the answers.

- Isaiah—53:5–6 (if you’re unfamiliar with a Bible, this means chapter 53 and verses 5 and 6 in that chapter)
- Mark—10:45 (words of Jesus)
- John—3:16–18 (words of Jesus)
- Romans—3:23–26; 5:6–11; 6:23; 10:9–13
- Ephesians—2:1–10
- 1 Peter—3:18
- 1 John—4:9–10; 5:11–13

After looking over these passages, ask yourself these questions:

1. What are the most important truths about me in these passages?
2. What are the most important truths about Jesus and what he has done for me?
3. How do these passages tell me to respond to this truth? Have I done this?
4. The Woodsman tells Nick that he needs help understanding the book and the red road. Who do you have to help you deal with spiritual issues in your own life? How can you go about finding more help?